DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 332 252 CS 507 462

AUTHOR Bjork, Ulf Jonas
TITLE American Media Domination and Audience Preference: A 60-Year Perspective.
PUB DATE May 91
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (41st, Chicago, IL, May 23-27, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audience Response; Global Approach; Higher Education; Intercultural Communication; *Mass Media; *Mass Media Effects; *Mass Media Use; Media Research; *North American Culture; Programing (Broadcast); Research Needs
IDENTIFIERS *Cultural Hegemony; Global Studies; *Media History

ABSTRACT

The debate over American dominance of mass media exports gained new momentum in the late 1980s, when the European Community moved toward restricting the number of television programs imported from non-European countries. Research suggests that Europeans enjoy American television programs such as "Dallas" because the series embody basic myths and let viewers identify with characters. Studies of East Indian viewers appreciation for Hollywood films attribute the films' popularity to their entertainment value, the opportunity to learn about Western life, and the films' superiority to their Indian counterparts. In Britain, the popularity of American movies has been attributed to the American emphasis on the youth and working-class values of courage, cunning, and luck. American domination of the world film industry began in the 1920s, as the American movie outnumbered other imports and domestic films in most countries. Some European countries limited American film imports, citing economic and cultural reasons. American writers explained the popularity of United States films by citing Hollywood's lavish production budgets. Early European critics observed that American filmmakers had a "sense of the film" that was lacking in Europe. Since global mass media studies are burgeoning in higher education, more academic research is needed to define audience appeal, particularly where economic and political influences do not blur the picture. (One hundred twelve notes and references are included.) (SG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED332252

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

American Media Domination and Audience Preference: A 60-Year Perspective

Ulf Jonas Bjork
Indiana University
School of Journalism at Indianapolis
ES 4103
902 W. New York
Indianapolis, IN 46220

CS507462

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Ulf Jonas Bjork

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

American Media Domination and Audience Preference: A 60-Year Perspective

Ulf Jonas Bjork
Indiana University
School of Journalism at Indianapolis
ES 4103
902 W. New York
Indianapolis, IN 46220
(317) 274-5933

AS507462

Presented to the Annual Conference of the International Communication Association, 1991.

The debate over the consequences of American dominance in mass media exports gained new momentum in the late 1980s, when the European Community moved toward restricting the number of television programs imported from non-European countries. Among researchers, that debate afforded a fresh opportunity to examine prevalent patterns in the flow of international mass communication. In the course of that examination, several studies have criticized earlier research for framing the theories of international flows solely in political and economic terms and ignoring that the preferences of the audience may also influence mass media imports.(83)(91)(92)(93) Noting that criticism, this paper explores the audience-preference aspect by looking at what qualities American mass media content is said to possess that enables it to appeal successfully to international audiences.

The sources for how these qualities are perceived are articles in American newspapers and magazines. The prospect of political action to alter international communication flows tends to fuel debate not only in academic circles but also among government officials and representatives of media industries, and the discussion surfaces in the media as a public issue. The arguments in that discussion are often partisan and not always accurate, but as a rule they, rather than academic research, tend to be the basis of media content and public policy.(81) Moreover, it is in these articles that the producers talk about media content, and their view of what international audiences like is a major influence on the products offered.

Debate over mass media exports and imports is often treated as a recent phenomenon, but, as the paper shows, its origins go back several decades. To provide a historical perspective and show that time has had relatively little impact on the basic arguments of the debate, two time periods 60 years apart are examined: the heyday of the silent film in the 1920s and the era of a rapidly changing European television market in the 1980s. In addition to looking at the press debate the paper reviews how scholarly research has treated the role of audience preferences when discussing the flow of international mass communication. It concludes by suggesting that preferences combined with market conditions best explains the success of American programming abroad.

International Media Flows: Statistics and Explanations

As noted above, a great deal of the recent discussion of worldwide flows of mass communication has sprung from the political debate over the international trade of television programs. Here, discussion has been based on studies documenting that the United States exports more programming than any other country in the world.(100)(62)(71) Although the debate over motion picture trade several decades earlier did not give rise to equally comprehensive theories seeking to explain the flow between countries, both contemporary and historical studies show a similar American predominance there; following World War I, films from the United States made up the bulk of what was shown in many countries.(90) In neither case, American producers disputed the figures, although they did try to keep their own export statistics secret to avoid stirring up public opinion against them abroad.(5)(90, pp. 123-24)

While some discussants of the current situation have seen American dominance as the result of a deliberate policy on the part of the U.S. government and multinational corporations, the majority of recent research regards it as the outcome of market forces, primarily the existence of a large American domestic market that absorbs most of the production costs.[1] (40)(39)(105)(106)(101)(60) Historians have taken that view as well;

as an example, Thompson's study of American film exports in the first decades of the twentieth century gives examples of government policies aiding the industry abroad, but she, too, explains American supremacy primarily as a result of economics.(90)

Both the deliberate-policy argument and the market explanation pay scant attention to the audience. As Sepstrup (83) points out, the underlying assumption is that viewers will accept uncritically whatever they are offered, regardless of its quality. In the purely economic perspective of Wildman and Siwek (105)(106), for instance, the only barriers facing American films and television programs are trade restrictions and language. Boyd (9) deals with reasons for importing programming but does so from the domestic programmer's point of view rather than that of the audience. Thompson (90) occasionally compares the appeal of American and European films, but her main focus is on how producers from the United States succeeded through effective distribution. De Usabel's book on the Latin American film market (98) takes the same approach, as does Phillips' study of international blockbusters.(67)

Where audience preference is taken into account to some degree, the question is often framed in terms of how it works *against* imports. The basic argument of Tracey (91)(92)(93) is that theories of cultural imperialism do not sufficiently take into account that audiences prefer domestic content to imported in the long run. Framing the research question along the same lines as Tracey, international audience studies by Mills (61) and Collins (17) stress language as a barrier to imports. To allow for a degree of audience influence in their microeconmic model of international television flows, Hoskins and Mirus (39) introduce the concept of a "cultural discount"--resistance to content originating outside one's own culture--as a factor counteracting market advantages. The two researchers note that American programs have a "low" cultural discount working against them, but their explanation is basically economic in nature, stressing the size and structure of the U.S. broadcasting industry.

Valid as both the cultural-discount concept and the preference for domestic over imported programming are when discussing to what extent American imports threaten domestic products, neither appears to be of much value in explaining why American television programs and films have been so successful in appealing to foreign audiences. On the whole, little of the research examining international television trade as a possible example of American media dominance has addressed that issue, and histories of film exports have largely avoided it as well.

Audience Views of the Appeal of American TV Programming

Audience research has a long record of studying American programming and foreign audiences, but, following what critics have called the "administrative" tradition[2], a great deal of that research is concerned with effects on behavior and attitudes rather than audience response to the programming itself. Examples are studies by Tsai (95), who looked at how television programs imported from the United States affected Taiwanese children; by Pingree and Hawkins (69), who examined the effects of American TV violence on Australian children; and by Kang and Morgan (45) and Tan *et al.* (88) of the clash between the values of American television and those of the national cultures of South Korea and the Philippines.

Moving from effects toward audience reception, a few studies of the 1970s and early 1980s looked at how foreign audiences reacted to American programs with a clearly intended purpose, implicitly or explicitly comparing them to audiences in the United States. Wilhoit and de Bock (107) studied whether the anti-prejudice message of *All in the Family* was received by Dutch viewers, while de Bock and Van Lil (8) and Diem (22) examined how Dutch and Austrian viewers had reacted to the historical information in *The Holocaust*.

The success of the American serial *Dallas* and its imitator *Dynasty* in Europe in the early 1980s spawned several studies trying to determine why these programs were so

popular. Many of these studies approached the subject from the perspective of reception theory and cultural studies, assuming that viewers are active and "read" American television shows a certain way.[3] The most extensive project, conducted by Liebes and Katz (52), noted that American television programs cross cultural and linguistic frontiers with "apparent ease" (53, pp. 187-88); in the case of *Dallas*, some of the appeal lay in the way the series embodied basic myths, similar to those of the Old Testament (51). Ang (4) and Herzog (38) stressed that *Dallas* provides pleasure for Dutch and German audience members and lets them identify with the characters, and Schröder (81) found that Danish viewers use *Dynasty* in the same manner.

The research on *Dallas* and *Dynasty* provides a great deal of information as to why these American programs are popular abroad, but it is ultimately more concerned with a genre than with the appeal of American programming as compared with that of other countries. (That genre was, of course, pioneered in the United States). Ang, for instance, sees *Dallas* as representative of all mass culture, not just American exports. An indication of the power of the genre rather than the national origin of specific programs is a study by Schenk and Rössler (81) that found that a German series using basically the same format as *Dallas*, *Schwarzwaldklinik*, appealed to viewers in the same manner. By and large, then, studies of television audiences have not sought to explain the overall popularity of American programs. Both film studies and articles in the press are far more likely to seek reasons for that popularity.

Explaining the International Popularity of Hollywood Films

Motions pictures have a longer standing as an American export than television programs, which may explain why a larger number of film studies have looked for a particularly American appeal. As early as 1935, Cressey (20) interviewed students in India about why they liked films from the United States and found that entertainment value and the opportunity to learn about Western life were the main reasons; American films were seen

as superior to their Indian counterparts in both respects. In a more elaborate analysis, Gans (30) found that American films were popular in Britain because they, more than British films, stressed youth and working-class values such as courage, cunning and luck. Intentionally or not, imports from the United States appealed to audiences ignored by domestic producers.

With the benefit of hindsight, historical studies of responses to American films abroad have also sought to explain what made them popular in the first place. A recent article by de Grazia (34) echoes Gans' conclusion that American films were more responsive than European productions to the needs of working class audiences, offering lessons about fashion and courtship to members of a rapidly changing society. Likewise, Tunstall (96, p. 50) sees the appeal of Hollywood films in their emphasis on upward social mobility, relative freedom for women and support of the young against the old. Shi's discussion (84) of how French intellectuals viewed American films after World War I points out that the very medium of film was seen as distinctly American, while European motion pictures were dismissed as filmed theatre.

When it comes to film, then, both audience surveys and historical studies stress that foreign viewers tended to prefer American films because of the qualities they possessed; these qualities included implicit message (the social values stressed), explicit content (the showcasing of American life), and presentation (the technical quality). As Americans defended their films and foreigners criticized them in the press debate, they stressed these and similar elements, both in the 1920s and in the 1980s.

The Beginnings of American Mass Media Dominance

By the mid-1920s, American motion pictures were shown on screens across the globe, and in most countries, they outnumbered other imports as well as domestic films.(90, pp. 101-147)(3) In fact, only three countries--Germany, the Soviet Union and Japan--were able to present their theater patrons with an equal or larger number of home-produced

films. In all three cases, openly political or social restrictions impeded imports from America.

The international film trade of the 1920s has significance for the study of American media dominance, because it was one of the first times the problem was defined. American mass culture had reached Europe before, in the form of journalism methods and popular mass fiction, but the scale of motion picture imports, the deliberate policy of American producers to expand abroad, and the power of the new mass medium combined to create a challenge never witnessed before.(76, pp. 35-37)(72) The direction of international film trade had, in fact, been turned around, because the major exporters before World War I were European countries, particularly France.(90, pp. 1-28)

Across Europe, the new American dominance raised calls for government action, and between 1925 and 1929, seven countries established quotas for imported films.(90, pp. 118-124, 211-212)(64) The European reasons for restrictions had two components. The first was economic considerations. Both Germany and France hoped restrictions would build up film industries capable of generating export revenue, while the British saw films as a way to advertise British goods and film production as a means of reducing domestic unemployment.(32)(27)(6)(97)(59)

The second part of the argument for restrictions concerned culture. British newspapers complained that British ideals and ideas were being obscured and a process of "Los Angelisation" was taking place, and from the Indian press came protests that the "high-speed civilization" portrayed in Hollywood movies was ill-suited to indigenous values.(14)(55)(41)(44, pp. 203-205) In France, a government decree expressed concern whether "national morals and traditions" could be preserved in the face of the American influx, and intellectuals worried that "the thoughts, the language and the souls" of the French would be Americanized.(27)(86)

To quota opponents in the United States, the cultural argument was irrelevant. They framed the issue purely in economic terms: quotas, they argued, impeded free trade

and, above all, flew in the face of obvious audience preference.

A First Explanation of Hollywood Appeal

American defenders of Hollywood films and foreign critics agreed that a major reason for their popularity were ample budgets. Noting that German and British films had to make do with fractions of the $200,000-300,000 spent on American movies, neither critics nor defenders were surprised that the former looked inferior and unsophisticated.(104)(108)(63)(26)(70) Large budgets translated into such important production values as spectacular special effects, a large number of extras available for crowd scenes, and elaborate sets.

This lavishness of American films was a major reason for their appeal, according to American writers commenting on foreign audiences. As a *New York Times* correspondent in Britain put it, movie patrons the were fascinated by "the bathrooms of Hollywood, the immense beds, the curtained telephones, dressing tables, the marble staircases, the custom of entertaining with your hat on, the vast automobiles, the dinners served amid fireworks to guests assembled in swimming pools."(108) Another of the paper's contributors reported that South American audiences were attracted by the same elements.(56) A French sociologist noted similar reaction in France and approved of the tendency of Hollywood productions to show young Frenchmen "a glimpse of a better, healthier, brighter, fuller life than theirs, ...lived by people of their own sort."(28)

The money available to American producers also explained another element of Hollywood appeal abroad, since it enabled the American movie industry to attract talent--technicians, writers and directors as well as stars--from all over the world.(63) "Poland, Berlin, Vienna and Scandinavia send us their loveliest sirens to produce 'American' films," mused a *New York Times* editorial, and a cartoon from the *Detroit News* showed how a Hollywood film was made with the contribution of a Spanish author, a German director, a Russian producer and actors from Italy, England and Sweden.(72)(55) This

foreign involvement meant that American films transcended nationality, one writer implied, since Hollywood only contributed the "actual filming."(13) In American films, then, foreign audiences could recognize elements of their own countries.

Critics saw the appeal of American films not so much in transcending nationalities as in appealing to a certain class. Although foreign critics disdained most Hollywood productions, they could not deny that audiences at large liked them. Contrary to European productions, movies from the United States aimed at a mass audience, evident, in the view of two hostile British observers, in the tailoring of the message to suit 12-year-olds and the "'hicks' of the hinterland."(15)(77)

In practical terms, the mass-audience appeal of Hollywood films was due to their following certain formulas. "Happy endings and a boy-and-girl plot" were the essence of most successful American exports, according to a British writer. One of his colleagues defined the happy ending of the typical American film as "dough, girl and car" and saw a general tendency to make problems and characters black and white.(15)(77) More benevolent, an English member of Parliament thought the plot of the average American film was laudable, depicting as it did "the strong he-man who lands the goods, the self-made man who struggles to the top."(25)

The way foreign critics uased the word "plot" implied a factory approach to film making that Hollywood representatives and American writers were less likely to emphasize; instead, they connected "plot" to a sense of craftmanship in American motion pictures. John Emerson, president of Actors' Equity, thought American films dominated in Europe because each of them was based on "a good story well constructed," (68) and a *New York Times* correspondent in London thought their strength lay in telling "a good story in original fashion with first-class photography."(13) To the *New York World*, it was a matter of Hollywood films having "more snap" and "more thrilling plots."(109) Joseph Schenk, president of United Artists, thought the matter was simpler than that: instead of the "preachment and problem" of European film producers, Hollywood gave

audiences entertainment.(79)

Foreign observers who were not hostile often conceded that U.S. producers had an advantage in their clearer understanding of the motion picture as a medium. A French critic thought that American directors alone had realized that film was a new mode of expression and not a continuation of stage and pantomime; consequently, they were the most inventive.(87) Similarly, a British moviegoer saw American directors as having "a sense of the film" which meant that their works avoided "the wooden acting and dragging stories" of British productions.(102)

To Europeans, the "sense of the film" evident in American productions was closely related to, if not a direct result of, an understanding of how motion pictures should be produced on a mass scale. A British author thought that a major reason for the success of Hollywood was that it had developed new stars specifically for the screen instead of relying on stage actors.(66) To a German actor, the male stars were shrewdly chosen, because they were "light, wholesome, handsome men who portray the types that all people like to see."(36) Another German praised the Hollywood casting system, which supplied "every nationality in the world, good leading women, and character actors."(70) As part of its effective production, the American film industry had wisely located in Southern California, where almost every kind of scenery was available.(2)(72)(65)

Overall, the debate over Hollywood films in the 1920s yieled detailed arguments why imports from America were so successful, arguments that incorporated both the influence of market forces and choices made by audiences due to the qualities of the films. Some of the detail was lost when an otherwise very similar debate over media imports from the United States the arose in the 1980s.

A Second European Reaction to American Dominance

Sixty years after the European-American controversy over Hollywood films, import quotas were again discussed as a means to change the flow of international communication. This time, the medium at issue was television, and Europeans were reacting not so much to *de facto* American dominance as to the prospects of it. Americans, in turn, were less concerned about quotas as a remedy than about their scale. Several European countries already had national restrictions on television in effect, but the restrictions proposed this time would make quotas uniform throughout the European Community.

Behind the debate were rapidly changing conditions of Western European broadcasting during the 1980s. Faced with new technologies that threatened the traditional monopoly of public-service broadcasters, European governments decided to deregulate broadcasting, increasing the number of channels by almost two thirds in the first five years of the 1980s.(12)(73)(11) The rising number of channels meant that the demand for programming to fill schedules would be higher than ever before. According to Eurepoean Community estimates, Western European broadcasters would eventually need between 300,000 and 500,000 programming hours each year, and domestic production would be able to fill less than one fifth of that demand.(82)(46) The rest would have to be imported, primarily from the United States, the world's largest exporter of television programs.

The prospect of channels dominated by American programming was vastly different from the situation in Western Europe in the 1980s, where, in all countries, programs from the United States outnumbered other imports but were in the minority compared with domestic productions.(78) To stop what was seen as an undesirable development, the European Community, led by France, began considering quotas on television programs imported from non-European countries in 1985.(75) After a great deal of political wrangling, the EC Commission finally passed a directive in 1989,

stipulating that a majority of the programming broadcast in member countries must be of European origin.(1)

As in the 1920s, the motives for restrictions had a clear economic component. Noting that the film and television industries played a major role in increasingly information-based economies, EC officials stressed their importance in providing employment and generating export revenue.(43) Proponents of the quotas also saw a connection between the television industry and general technological development, vital to keep all European industries competitive.(85)(47)

The cultural argument also reappeared. The main reason for restricting only non-European programming was a desire to create a common European cultural identity, seen as crucial to the success of the European Community.(18, pp. 5, 10-11.) American programming counteracted that desire, thought French Minister of Culture Jack Lang, because it fed European viewers "standardized images manufactured elsewhere."(94) To the head of a French studio, children in France were in danger of losing "all relationship with the culture of their parents and grandparents," thinking that "sheriffs and cowboy hats are as French as gendarmes and cowboy hats."(24) In the European Parliament, American television was accused of promoting a "hamburger and ketchup culture."(21)

For the most part, American government and industry representatives responded to these arguments as their predecessors had 60 years earlier. Culture was not the issue, they said; economics was, and restrictions went against consumer wishes.(24)(99)

The Strengths of American Television

As the debate over American dominance in television programming repeated many points from the 1920s, so did explanations as to why it was so popular in Europe. The fascination with America itself was still present, for instance. British newsweekly *The Economist* though that viewers worldwide were intrigued by the image of the United States as it was presented on television, "glossy wealth with an underside of violent crime

and corruption."(89)

Productions from the United States could still boast of superior technical quality, according to both Americans and Europeans.(23) An executive at 20th Century Fox thought it was a matter "know-how and professionalism," and an official from the French Ministry of Culture dejectedly agreed, finding American programs "so very good" and hard to compete with.(73)(54) To a French TV programmer, they combined "fast pacing" with good acting, and *The Economist* thought that U.S. producers had mastered "the visual language of escapism."(89)(24)(37)

To the sophisticated appearance of American programs, *The Economist* added that the topics and plots preferred by the American television industry were a major reason for its success abroad. U.S. programs consisted of "fast-moving action and adventure, tales of the glamorous rich, and I-wish-I'd-said-that wisecracking situation comedies."(89) A U.S. academic stressed that films and programs from America had always concentrated on "good stories and action, escapist and adventure pictures."(103) British audience researcher Michael Tracey saw the reason for American appeal in its skilled mix of "drama, family, romance, power, sex, and intrigue."(91) To others, American success was a matter of the different function of television in the United States, where, in the words of a British analyst, it was "served up to entertain and amuse with a minimum of concentration."(58)(78)

Defenders of Hollywood in the 1920s had claimed that American films transcended nationality because industry personnel were from around the globe, and a similar if more vaguely stated argument appeared in the 1980s, holding forth that media products from the United States possessed a greater universality than their European counterparts. To an executive at the British satellite channel Sky, the United States had produced "universal stories."(57) An American producer considered most successful exports "good-guy-bad-guy morality plays," with equivalents in literature and drama in every culture; hence, they were easily understood.(10)

To some, that universality was easily explained; it was not due to the qualities of the program but a function of long-standing familiarity with Hollywood. A German EC official considered viewers in his homeland so accustomed to American plots and style that the programs no longer seemed foreign; French productions, on the other hand, met with resistance because Germans were not used to them.(48) Similarly, *The Observer* though Britons accepted American imports so readily because they had seen "Dreamland entertainment" for decades.(89) A few years before the television debate of the 1980s, Tunstall (96, p. 50) had made the same argument, tracing the popularity of American television to the success of Hollywood films before World War II.

Like the 1920s film debate, the debate over EC television restrictions explained the appeal of American productions in terms of superior technical quality, a general mastery of story telling and a vaguely stated assertion that films and programs produced in the United States had an inherent universality.

Conclusion: The Validity of the Audience-Preference Argument

In its criticism that much of the research on international flow of media products explain the direction of that flow solely in political or economic terms without taking audience preferences into consideration, this paper sees the disregard for the audience as the shortcoming, not the use of economics and government policies as explanations. Audience, economics and policy all contribute to explain the flow, as Gripsrud (35) notes. As an example of the power of economic factors, the large U.S. home market does not only make it possible for American products to be offered at a relatively low price internationally, it also affects the characteristics that make the product appealing. The debaters of the 1920s routinely noted that America's large domestic market permitted films from the United States to enjoy large budgets, which in turn resulted in spectacular production values. Similarly, the high degree of technical skill had its roots in budgets that paid high salaries to the best talent not only in the United States but

worldwide.(66)(72)

Economics and industry structure are also important because they can make what audiences prefer only a minor influence on what they are given. As European broadcasters were seeking ways to fill a vastly expanded number of programming hours in the 1980s, they found domestic production insufficient. To fill their schedules, they would have to turn to American exports, which, again due to the large U.S. home market, were not only inexpensive but plentiful.(40)(46) Here, Tracey's (91)(92)(93) argument that audiences prefer domestic over foreign programming seems irrelevant, since the choice would not really be there in the first place, once viewers had "used up" the small share of programming supplied by domestic producers. In the 1920s, price and quantity was not always an advantage to American film exporters, but an effective and at times coercive system of distribution was, which forced some foreign exhibitors to buy blocks of movies to obtain a few popular features.(90, p. 126) Again, audiences had a limited choice, since what they were being offered had been determined before the films reached the theaters.

Although it seems less important than economic influences, the impact of government policies on international media flows should must also be acknowledged. During and prior to the silent-film debate, the U.S. government actively assisted the motion picture industry with statistics and other information, seeing the films as a way to promoted American industry abroad.(90, pp. 117-118) In the 1980s, the American film and television industry was able to enlist government officials up to the presidential level in a lobbying effort against the EC quotas.(16) (The quotas themselves are, of course, another way government policy affects the flow of communication.)

What, then, is the role of audience preference? It is evident from the review of the press debates in the 1920s and the 1980s that American producers, at least, see it as a major determinant of those flows. Championing an international market free of barriers against their product, it is, of course, in their interest to do so; arguments stressing the

dominant American position in that market go against that interest, since they could make a case for barriers. Nevertheless, the points raised about audiences choosing American films and television programs because of their qualities seem to merit academic examination.

Such examination needs to note, for instance, that examples exist where American programming has been rejected by foreign audiences. For all its success in Europe, *Dallas* was not accepted by viewers in Japan and Brazil, and the half-hour situation comedies popular with American viewers have not done well abroad.(89)(10)(52) Some 60 years ago, American film exporters encountered similar audience resistance to some of their movies in China.(20) In these cases price, technical quality and elaborate distribution structures were unable to surmount audience resistance.

Rejection seem to be the exception rather than the norm, however, and future studies should pose the question why American products were so popular that films from the United States dominated the world's movie screens in the 1920s and the country's exports of television programs overshadowed that of all other nations in the 1980s. The reception-theory studies reviewed in this paper touch on that question, but they in their concern with viewer readings they are not asking it as directly as Gans (29) and Cressey (19) did in their studies of American films abroad. Gans and Cressey appear to have asked movie pastrons simply what it was about imports from the United States that appealed to them, and that question deserves to be asked again.

In that inquiry, the arguments brought forth in the press should be incorporated, simple as they may seem. What role do the production values of a program or film play in attracting audiences, for instance? Has the multiethnic composition of the American population made producers in the United States more attuned to themes, formulas and plots that appeal to international viewers? Do American producers have a better sense of the media of film and television?

Two other avenues suggest themselves for further research. The first is a

comparative approach, contrasting the appeal of American programming to that of domestic or other foreign producers. What is it about French television shows that makes them less acceptable than American ones to German viewers, for instance?(48) Second, a historical perspective is valuable, making the comparisons suggested above not only between countries but also over time. As this paper shows, the debate over American media dominance was the virtually the same at two points in time 60 years apart.

Moreover, studying the origin of an issue is always useful. In this case, the arguments of the 1920s are "uncontaminated" by the current explanation that television audiences prefer American programs due to long-standing Hollywood dominance. The study of a time when that dominance was just beginning can make the role of audience preference clearer. What made the audiences of the 1920s develop a taste for films from America when they had preferred French productions before World War I? How did silent films set a pattern of easy exportability that would be followed by sound films in the 1930s and television programs after World War II? Here, of course, direct audience studies are impossible. An alternative method is the one used in this paper, statements by producers in the press; another could be a systematic study of reviews of individual films.

Ultimately, it seems useful to widen the study beyond the issue of American dominance and look at exporters other than the United States in an attempt to find a general definition of audience appeal. The long-standing success of Mexican exports to Latin America and the more recent exports of Brazilian programming to Europe do not seem easily explained in terms of the international political power or market control of the exporting country. Where economic and political influences do not blur the picture, the role audience preference plays may be clearer.

NOTES

[1] See Sepstrup (83) and Lee (50, pp. 29-65) for an exhaustive review of the different perspectives

[2]Budd, M., R. Entman and C. Steinman. "The Affirmative Character of U.S. Cultural Studies." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7 (1990), p. 169.

[3]See Gripsrud (35) for a criticism of this approach.

REFERENCES:

1. Alterman, S. "EC, Risking U.S. Anger, Sets Rules to Promote European TV." *Reuter Business Report*, Oct. 3, 1988, BC Cycle.

2. "American and British Films Coming to Grips." *Literary Digest*, Aug. 28, 1926, p. 23.

3. "American Film Export Is 225,000,000 Feet." *New York Times*, Feb. 14, 1926, p. 4.

4. Ang, I. *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London: Meuthen, 1985.

5. "As MCA Deals in Germany, Italy, Davis Hits 'Harmful' Export Figures." *Television/Radio Age*, March 6, 1989, p. 21.

6. "Asks Empire to Act Against Our Films." *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1926, p. 6.

7. Barry, I. "Films for the Empire." *The Spectator* 137, Oct. 30, 1926, pp. 736-737.

8. de Bock, H. and J. van Lil. "*Holocaust* in the Netherlands." *Mass Communication Review Yearbook* 2, 1981, pp. 639-646.

9. Boyd, D. "The Janus Effect? Imported Television Programming in Developing Countries" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 1, 1984, pp. 379-391.

10. Brown, C. "Tinseltown Takes on the World." *Los Angeles Daily News*, May 8, 1989, in *Newsbank*, BUS 63:G14.

11. Brown, L. "The Path Once Taken." *Channels Field Guide*, 1988, pp. 24-28.

12. Browne, A. "Europe Braces for Free Market TV." *Fortune*, Feb. 24, 1984, p. 74.

13. Butcher, H. "World's Screen Censors." *New York Times*, Nov. 6, 1927, sec. IX, p. 6.

14. "Calls British Films Unworthy Product." *New York Times*, July 5, 1926, p. 5.

15. Carter, J. "Hollywood Has a Foreign War." *New York Times*, March 4, 1928, sec. X, p. 13.

16. Cieply, M. "Jack Valenti's Balancing Act: MPAA's Chief Walks the Line as Studios Expand Interest." *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 3, 1989, sec. VI, p. 1.

17. Collins, R. "The Language of Advantage: Satellite Television in Western Europe." *Media, Culture and Society* 11, 1989, pp. 351-371

18. Commission of the European Communities. "Realities and Tendencies in European Television: Perspectives and Options." Interim Report, COM(83), Final, Brussels, 1983.

19. Cressey, P. "The Influence of Moving Pictures on Students in India," *American Journal of*

Sociology 41 (3), Nov. 1935, pp. 341-350.

20. Croy, H. "Movie Fans in China." *Colliers*, April 8, 1916, pp. 23-24

21. *Debates of the European Parliament*, 24.5.89, 2-378/120.

22. Diem, P. "'Holocaust' and the Austrian Viewer." *Mass Communication Review Yearbook* 2, 1981, pp. 647-52.

23. Dunkley, C. "Tell it like it is, old chap." *Advertising Age*, March 12, 1984, p. M-12.

24. Eger, J. "Viewpoints." *Television/Radio Age*, April 15, 1985, p. 137.

25. "English M.P. Lauds Our Film Morality." *New York Times*, April 13, 1927, p. 6.

26. Eyre, L. "America Has Grip on German Movies." *New York Times*, Nov. 11, 1925, 25.

27. "French Divided on Film Decree." *New York Times*, Feb. 20, 1928, p. 5.

28. "Frenchman Sees Our Films as Good Influence Abroad." *New York Times*, Dec. 26, 1925, p. 18.

29. Gans, H. "Hollywood Films on British Screens: An Analysis of the Functions of American Popular Culture Abroad." *Social Problems* 9(4) 1962, 324-328.

30. "German Fears Our Films." *New York Times*, Nov. 24, 1925, p. 19.

31. "German-American Films." *Living Age* 333, Oct. 1, 1927, pp. 647-648.

32. "Germany Restricts Use of Our Films." *New York Times*, Dec. 27, 1925, sec. VIII, p. 3.

33. de Grazia, V. "Mass Culture and Sovereignty: The American Challenge to European Cinemas, 1920-1960." *Journal of Modern History* 61, March 1989, pp. 53-87.

34. Greenhouse, S. "For Europe, U.S. May Spell TV." *New York Times*, July 31, 1989, p. C1.

35. Gripsrud, J. "Toward a Flexible Methodology in Studying Media Meaning: *Dynasty* in Norway." *Critical studies in Mass Communication* 7 (1990), pp. 117-28.

36. Gulick, P. "Internationalize Screen, Noted German Star Urges." *New York Times*, Feb. 6, 1927, sec. VII, p. 5.

37. Hanke, T. "European Television Prepares to Hit Back at the Dallas Syndrome." *The German Tribune*, July 16, 1989, p. 10.

38. Herzog, H. "Dallas in Deutschland." *Rundfunk und Fernsehen* 34 (3) 1986, 351-367.

39. Hoskins, C. and R. Mirus. "Reasons for US Dominance of the International Trade in Television Programmes." *Media, Culture and Society* 10, 1988, pp. 499-515.

40. Hoskins, C., R. Mirus, and W. Rozeboom, "U.S. Television Programs in the International Market: Unfair Pricing?" *Journal of Communication* 39(2), Spring 1989, pp. 55-75.

41. "India Sends Protest on American Films." *New York Times*, Nov. 15, 1926, p. 4.

42. "International Report." *Television/Radio Age*, April 3, 1989, p. 18

43. Jarrett, R. "1988 Is European Cinema and Television Year." *Europe*, April 1988, pp. 42-43.

44. Jowett, G. *Film: The Democratic Art*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1976.

45. Kang, J. and M. Morgan. "Cultural Clash: Impact of U.S. Television in Korea," *Journalism Quarterly* 65 (2), Summer 1988, pp. 431-438.

46. Koltai, S. "Coming Attractions in European TV: Problems and Prospects for Cable and Satellite Television." *Columbia Journal of World Business*, Fall 1987, pp. 57-63.

47. Kuche, L. "Europe Takes a Breath as It Steps into the Age of International TV." *German Tribune*, July 24, 1988, p. 6.

48. LaFranchi, H. "Europeans Balk at Rising Tide of American Movies." *Christian Science Monitor*, Sept. 29, 1989, p. 6.

49. Lang, A. "Le Cinema." *Les Annales* 89, Sept. 15, 1927, 276.

50. Lee, C. *Media Imperialism Reconsidered: The Homogenizing of Television Culture*. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980.

51. Liebes, T. and E. Katz. "Dallas and Genesis: Primordiality and Seriality in Popular Culture." In *Media, Myths and Narratives: Television and the Press*. Ed. by J. Carey. Newbury Park: Sage, 1988.

52. Liebes, T. and E. Katz. *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of Dallas*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

53. Liebes, T. and E. Katz. "Mutual Aid in the Decoding of Dallas: Preliminary Notes from a Cross-Cultural Study." In *Television in Transition: Papers from the first International Television studies Conference*. Ed. by P. Drummond and R. Paterson. London: British Film Institute, 1984.

54. Longwort, R. "Common TV Market: Europe Mobilizes as America's 'Cosby,' 'Cannon' & Co. Invade the Tube." *Chicago Tribune* Nov. 13, 1989, sec. TEMPO, p. 1.

55. "Los Angelisation of Britain." *Literary Digest*, May 7, 1927, pp. 28-29.

56. MacAdam, G. "Our New Art for Export." *New York Times*, April 13, 1924, sec. IV, p. 2.

57. Margolis, I. and E. Hanson. "Americans Worry About Collective Euro Quota Action." *Television/Radio Age*, July 24, 1989, pp. 31-32.

58. Marshall, T. "Satellite, Cable at Last: For Europe, More to Touch on that Dial." *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 8, 1989, p. 1.

59. Maxwell, J. "British Films." *Nation & Athenaeum*, Feb. 26, 1927, pp. 721-22.

60. Mazzetti, E. "Europe the Television Industry and the Television Market." *Journal of Regional Policy* 5, Jan./March 1985, pp. 63-79.

61. Mills, P. "An International Audience?" *Media, Culture and Society* 7, 1985, pp. 487-501.

62. Nordenstreng, K. and T. Varis. "Television Traffic--A One-Way Street?" *Unesco Reports and Papers on Mass Communication* 70, 1974.

63. North, C. "Our Silent Ambassadors." *Independent*, June 12, 1926, pp. 689-690.

64. Ormsbee, H. "Europe's Film Quotas." *New York Times*, Feb. 19, 1928, VIII:3.

65. "Our Films in England." *New York Times*, March 11, 1925, p.16.

66. Paterson, P. "British Need New Film Methods." *New York Times*, July 18, 1926, sec. VII, p. 2.

67. Phillips, J. "Film Conglomerate 'Blockbusters.'" *Journal of Communication* 25(2), Spring 1975, pp. 171-182.

68. "Picture-Making Abroad." *New York Times*, Dec. 17, 1922, sec. VII, p. 2.

69. Pingree, S. and R. Hawkins. "U.S. Programs on Australian Television: The Cultivation Effect." *Journal of Communication* 31(1), 1981, pp. 97-105.

70. Pommer, E. "Hands Across the Sea in Movie Development." *New York Times*, Jan. 16, 1927, sec. VII, p. 5.

71. Pragnell, A. "Television in Europe: Quality and Values in a Time of Change." *Media Monograph* 5. Manchester: European Institute for the Media, University of Manchester, 1985.

72. "Predeccesors of American Films." *New York Times*, July 1, 1926, p. 22

73. "Privatization of Europe," *Broadcasting* 110, March 31, 1986, p. 60

74. "Reinhardt to Aid Films Here." *New York Times*, Dec. 3., 1927, p. 7.

75. "Resolution on a framework for a European media policy Based on the Commission's Green Paper on the Establishment of the Common Market for Broadcasting, Especially by Satellite and Cable." *Official Journal of the European Communities*, 11.11.85, C288/115-117.

76. Rosenberg, E. *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.

77. "Says 'Hicks' Demand Happy Screen Ending." *New York Times*, Aug. 28, 1925, p. 13.

78. "Scaling the Walls of Fortress Europe." *TV World*, April 1990, 29-33.

79. "Schenk in Europe Urges Film Unity," *New York Times*, Aug. 2, 1928, p. 25

80. Schenk, M. and P. Rössler. "'Dallas' und 'Schwarzwaldklinik.'" *Rundfunk und Fernsehen* 35 (2) 1987, 218-228.

81. Schröder, K. "'Dynasty' in Denmark: Towards a Social Semiotic of the Media Audience." *Nordicom Review of Nordic Mass Communication Research* 1, 1988, 6-13.

82. de Selys, G. "Europe's Audiovisual Challenge." *Europe*, April 1989, pp. 28-29.

83. Sepstrup, P. "Research into International Television Flows: A Methodological Contribution." *European Journal of Communication* 4, 1989, pp. 393-407.

84. Shi, D. "Transatlantic Visions: The Impact of the American Cinema Upon the French Avant-Garde, 1918-1924." *Journal of Popular Culture* 14, 1980-81, pp. 583-596.

85. Snoddy, R. "The Changing Face of European T.V." *Europe*, April 1988, pp. 26-28, 46

86. Strauss, D. "The Rise of Anti-Americanism in France: French Intellectuals and the American Film Industry, 1927-1932." *Journal of Popular Culture* 10 (4), 1977, pp. 752-759.

87. "Superiority of American to European Films as Explained by a French Critic." *Current Opinion*, Oct. 1917, pp. 250-251.

88. Tan, A., G. Tan and A. Tan. "American Television in the Philippines: A Test of Cultural Impact." *Journalism Quarterly* 64 (1), Winter 1987, pp. 65-72, 144.

89. "The Emperor's New Imperialism." *The Economist*, Dec. 20, 1986, 14.

90. Thompson, K. *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907-1934*. London: BFI Publishing, 1985.

91. Tracey, M. "European Viewers: What Will They Really Watch?" *Columbia Journal of World Business* Fall 1987, pp. 77-85.

92. Tracey, M. "Popular Culture and the Economics of Global Television." *InterMedia* 16(2), March 1988, pp. 9-25.

93. Tracey, M. "The Poisoned Chalice: International Television and the Idea of Dominance." *Deadealus* 114, Fall 1989, pp. 17-56.

94. Trevelyan, M. "Europe Rallies Against Invasion of Foreign Pop Culture." *Reuter Library Report*, July 24, 1988, BC cycle.

95. Tsai, M. "Some Effects of American Television Programs on Children in Formosa." *Journal of Broadcasting* 14 (2), Spring 1970, pp. 229-238.

96. Tunstall, J. *The Media are American*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.

97. "Urges Forced Use of British Films." *New York Times*, Oct. 7, 1926, p. 4.

98. de Usabel, G. *The High Noon of American Films in Latin America*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982.

99. Valenti, J. "Television with Manacles." *Washington Post*, Dec. 1, 1989, p. A27.

100. Varis, T. "International Flow of Television Programs." *Unesco Reports and Papers on Mass Communication* 100, 1985.

101. Waterman, D. "World Television Trade: The Economic Effects of Privatization and New Technology." *Telecommunications Policy* June 1988, pp. 141-151.

102. "What Has Become of British Films?" *Spectator* 135, July 4, 1925, p. 13.

103. "Where U.S. Still Rules: Movies, Television." *U.S. News & World Report*, July 15, 1985, p. 28.

104. "Why American Films Are Best." *New York Times*, May 20, 1923, sec. VII, p. 2.

105. Wildman, S. and S. Siwek. "The Privatization of European Television: Effects on International Markets for Programs." *Columbia Journal of World Business* Fall 1987, pp. 71-76.

106. Wildman, S. and S. Siwek. *International Trade in Films and Television Programs*. Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1988.

107. Wilhoit, C. and H. de Bock. "'All in the Family' in Holland." *Journal of Communication* 26 (4), Fall 1976, pp., 75-84.

108. Wilson, P. "Hollywood Subdues the Proud Briton." *New York Times Magazine*, May 14, 1925, pp. 3, 18.

109. "Yankee Films that Disagree with John Bull." *Literary Digest*, Feb. 21, 1920, pp. 62-63.